

Blackfoot River Recreation Management

2008 Annual Report

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Introduction

Located near Missoula, Montana, the Blackfoot River is one of Montana's popular rivers for recreation. Visitors to the Blackfoot enjoy beautiful scenery and a diverse range of recreational opportunities such as angling, whitewater boating, inner-tubing, camping, picnicking and sunbathing.

In addition to public access sites, the Blackfoot River Recreation Corridor Landowner's Agreement provides public access to private land 50 feet above the high water mark. This agreement was a product of visionary Blackfoot landowners and cooperative managing agencies. The Blackfoot River Recreation Corridor extends from Russell Gates Fishing Access Site (FAS) to Johnsrud FAS.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) manages recreation on and along the Blackfoot River in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through a cooperative management agreement. The following report summarizes program components, visitor use statistics, management activities, and accomplishments from 2008.

Seasonal Conditions

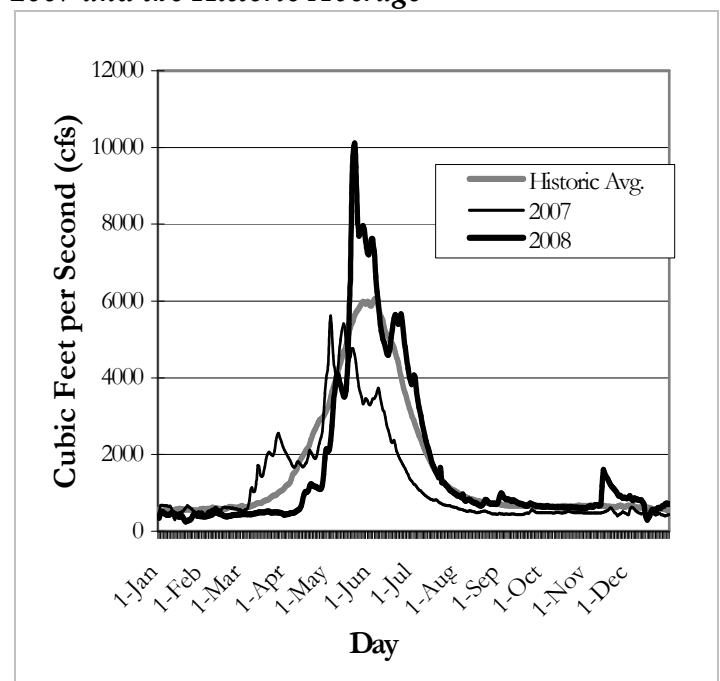
Figure 2 shows the hydrograph for the Blackfoot River during the 2007 and 2008 summer season, as well as the historic average. This graph compares the river's flow throughout the year and helps to explain how water levels affect visitation on the Blackfoot. This data was taken at the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Bonner gauging station (#12340000).

The 2008 season saw a good snowpack in the Blackfoot drainage. The combination of good snowpack and cool spring weather conditions led to a spring runoff season with flows remaining high and water temperatures low



The Blackfoot River between Lincoln and Ovando

Figure 2: Blackfoot River Flows – 2008 Compared to 2007 and the Historic Average



through June. Compared to recent years with restrictions, there were no fishing or campfire restrictions that applied to the Blackfoot River and its access sites. These conditions provided longer whitewater and angling opportunities with a shorter inner-tubing season.

Staffing

The FWP Blackfoot River Recreation Manager, Chris Lorentz, is responsible for day-to-day operations, implementation of programs, and compiling reports related to recreation on the Blackfoot River. This year-round position is based out of Seeley Lake, MT. The Blackfoot River Recreation Manager is assisted by the following FWP staff who have responsibilities specific to managing recreation on the Blackfoot.

- Recreation Warden (year-round)
- River Ranger (3/4 year)
- Survey Technician (May – Aug.)
- Upper Blackfoot Caretaker (May – Aug.)
- Lower Blackfoot Caretaker (May – Aug.)

In addition to staff positions dedicated specifically to the Blackfoot River, there are other FWP personnel such as Program Managers, Wardens and Biologists who also contribute to management of the Blackfoot.

Blackfoot River Reaches

The Blackfoot River is broken into seven reaches for the

purpose of managing recreation. These reaches are defined geographic sections of the river based on the physical setting and types of recreational experiences associated with each section. Additionally, maximum group size limits have been established specifically for each reach. Table 1 lists the seven reaches and a description of their locations.

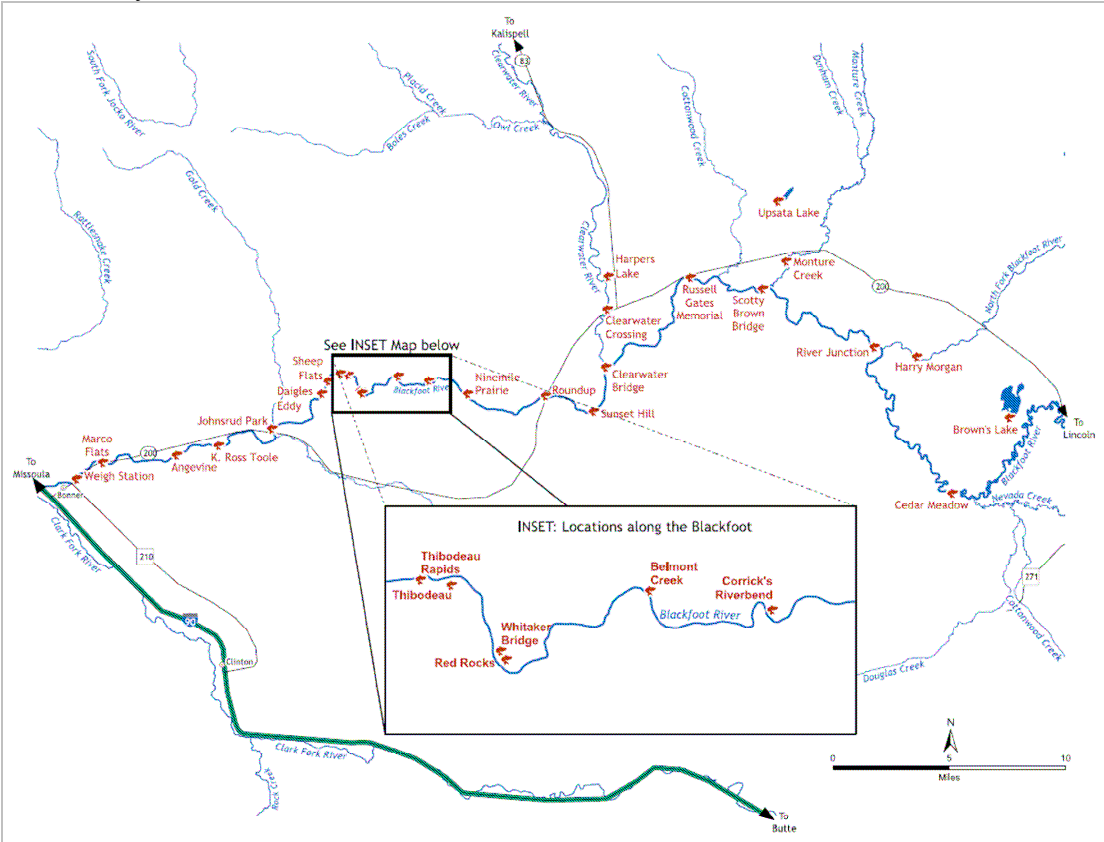
Table 1: Blackfoot River Reaches

Reach	Reach Definition/Description
1	Headwaters to Mineral Hill
2	Mineral Hill to the North Fork Confluence
3	North Fork Confluence (or Harry Morgan on the North Fork) to Russell Gates
4	Russell Gates to Roundup
5	Roundup to Johnsrud
6	Johnsrud to Bonner
7	North Fork Blackfoot River (above Harry Morgan)

Visitor Use Statistics

There are currently three methods utilized to gather visitor use statistics for the Blackfoot River: (1) statewide FWP angling surveys, (2) electronic traffic counters placed at selected access sites and locations throughout the Blackfoot, and (3) a summer use monitoring survey that takes place each summer from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Each of these methods and results are described in the following subsections.

The Blackfoot River & Access Sites



Angling Survey

FWP conducts statewide angling surveys every other year for a single given license year (the beginning of March through the end of February). These surveys provide angling pressure estimates (in angling days) for specific water bodies in Montana along with angler satisfaction and angler crowding ratings. The most recent estimates available for this report are those from 2007.

Table 2 compares angling pressure estimates from 2001 through 2007 for four sections of the Blackfoot and the North Fork Blackfoot Rivers. These sections do not directly correspond with the river

reaches for managing recreation that were described earlier. Instead, they were developed for fisheries management purposes.

Table 3 compares angler satisfaction and crowding ratings for the Blackfoot River during 2007. Also listed are the average number of people seen during each trip, year-round and during the summer months for both resident and non-resident anglers.

During 2007, 79% of the angling days on the Blackfoot River occurred during the summer months (May through September). Non-resident anglers made up 38% of the total angling use. Angler satisfaction indicated residents were slightly more satisfied than non-residents. Residents perceived the river to be slightly more crowded than non-residents. The number of people observed during each trip for 2007 was lower for residents and about the same for non-residents when compared to 2005.

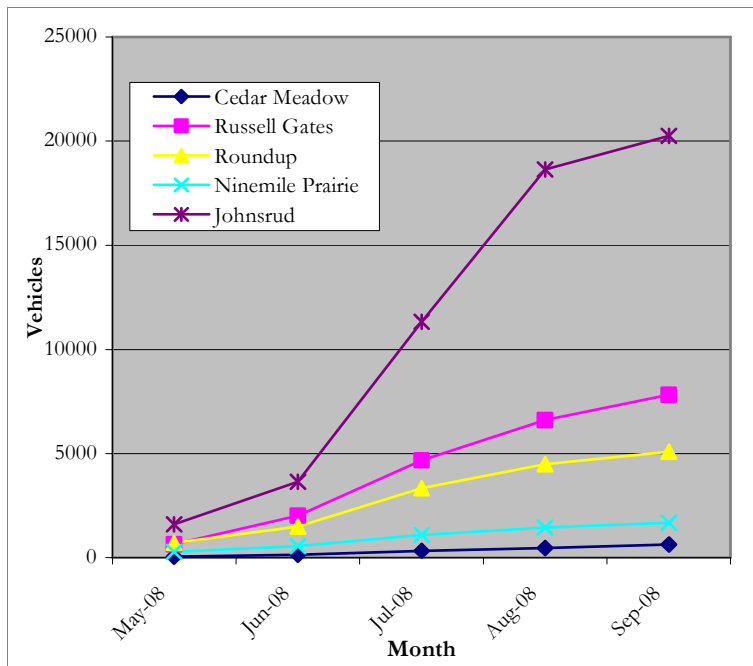
Table 2: Comparison of Angling Pressure (in Angling Days) on the Blackfoot and North Fork Blackfoot Rivers (2001-2007).

River Section	Angling Days/Year			
	2001	2003	2005	2007
Headwaters to Arrastra Creek	4939	4142	7220	3182
Arrastra Creek to the North Fork	5050	5072	2900	4286
North Fork to the Clearwater River	12940	11355	8549	12685
Clearwater River to the Mouth of the Blackfoot	13330	18456	18268	13580
Blackfoot Total	36259	39025	36937	33733
North Fork Blackfoot River	1058	833	2602	953

Table 3: 2005 & 2007 Blackfoot River Angler Satisfaction and Crowding Ratings

	Resident		Non-resident	
	2005	2007	2005	2007
Year-round Angler Satisfaction Rating 1 (poor) – 5 (excellent)	2.84	2.97	2.92	2.85
Summer Angler Satisfaction Rating 1 (poor) – 5 (excellent)	2.85	2.97	2.89	2.82
Year-round Angler Crowding Rating 1 (sparse) – 5 (crowded)	2.08	2.10	1.73	1.67
Summer Angler Crowding Rating 1 (sparse) – 5 (crowded)	2.16	2.20	1.78	1.71
Average # of Other People Seen During Each Trip (Year-round)	12	8	9	10
Average # of Other People Seen During Each Trip (Summer)	13	7	10	10

Figure 3: Traffic Counts for Blackfoot River Fishing Access Sites (May through September)



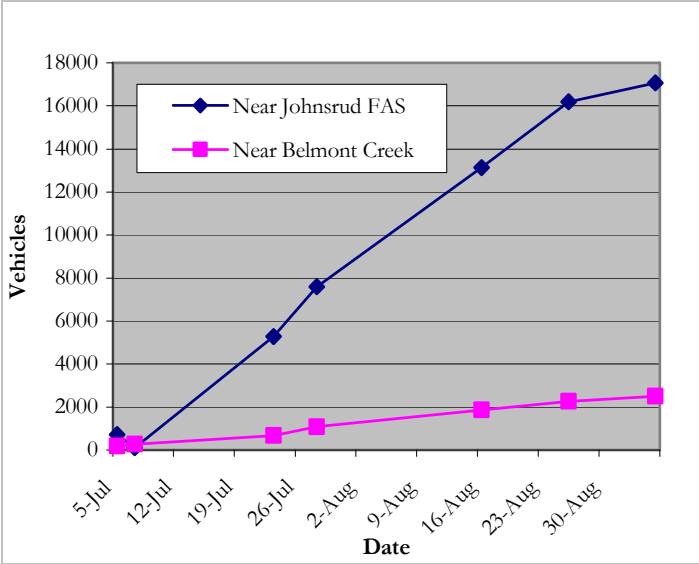
Electronic Traffic Counts

Traffic counts are collected at certain sites along the Blackfoot River through the use of electronic counters. These counters record the number of vehicles using sites and data is collected by FWP staff and compiled on a monthly basis. This data can be used to compare the amount of traffic using a site over the course of a season and to compare use trends from one year to the next.

Figure 3 compares the cumulative traffic counts for the five Blackfoot River fishing access sites with counters during the course of the 2008 season.

Additionally, two traffic counters monitor vehicle passage on the Blackfoot Corridor road between Johnsrud FAS and Belmont Creek. Figure 4 shows cumulative traffic counts collected at those locations from July 5th through the end of August.

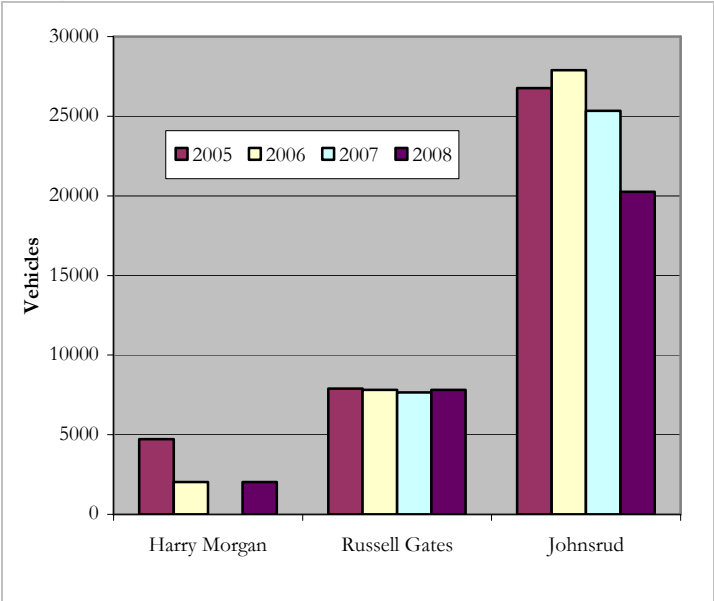
Figure 4: Summer Traffic Counts on the Blackfoot Corridor Road Near Johnsrud FAS and Belmont Creek.



Higher volumes of traffic are found near Johnsrud FAS and are likely due to large numbers of recreationists driving up the road to access the Blackfoot River at Whitaker Bridge.

Figure 5 shows a comparison of three Blackfoot River access sites that have monitored summer traffic counts over the past four years. Vehicle numbers at the sites has remained steady or declined considerably over four years. There are no values recorded for 2007 at Harry Morgan because a counter was not in place.

Figure 5: Comparison of Summer Traffic Counts at Three Blackfoot River Fishing Access Sites (2005-2008)

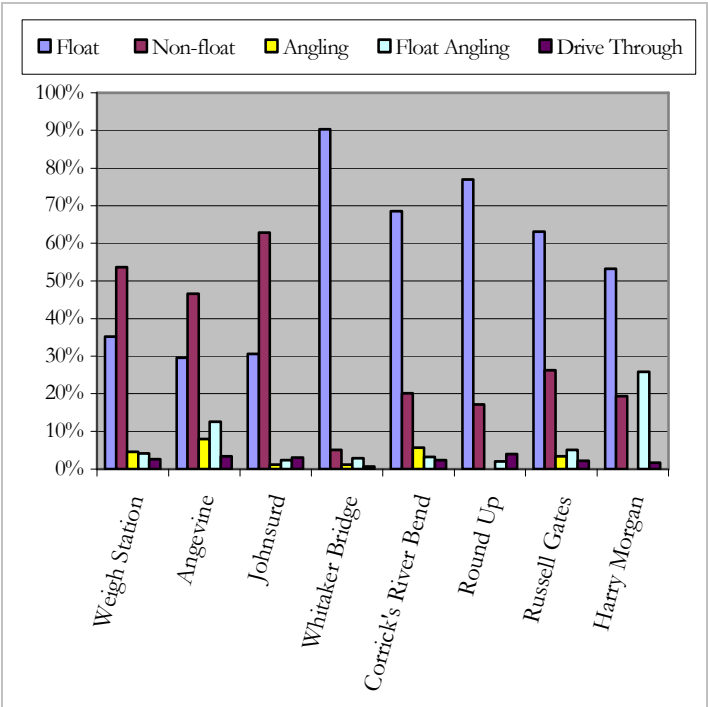


Summer Use Survey

From Memorial Day through Labor Day a use monitoring survey is conducted to help FWP and the BLM understand the type of use occurring on the Blackfoot River and at access sites. The survey compares the amount of use occurring at eight access sites throughout the Blackfoot. These sites were selected by managers to capture information that is reflective of the seven reaches of the Blackfoot during the summer season. In an effort to capture representative data, sites are randomly selected for sampling during different times of the day on weekends and weekdays. The eight fishing access sites selected for the use monitoring survey are Harry Morgan, Russell Gates, Roundup, Corrick’s River Bend, Whitaker Bridge, Johnsrud, Angevine, and Weigh Station.

The Blackfoot River provides a diverse array of recreational opportunities. The use monitoring survey distinguishes between float angling, wade angling, floating, non-floating and drive through use. The floating category is comprised of any float use that does not include angling. The non-floating category is comprised of any activities occurring at the site other than angling or floating. Examples could include picnicking, swimming, or sunbathing. The drive through category is comprised of visitors to a site who drive through the site without stopping or stop only to use the restroom. Figure 6 shows the percentage of people participating in these activity categories for each site.

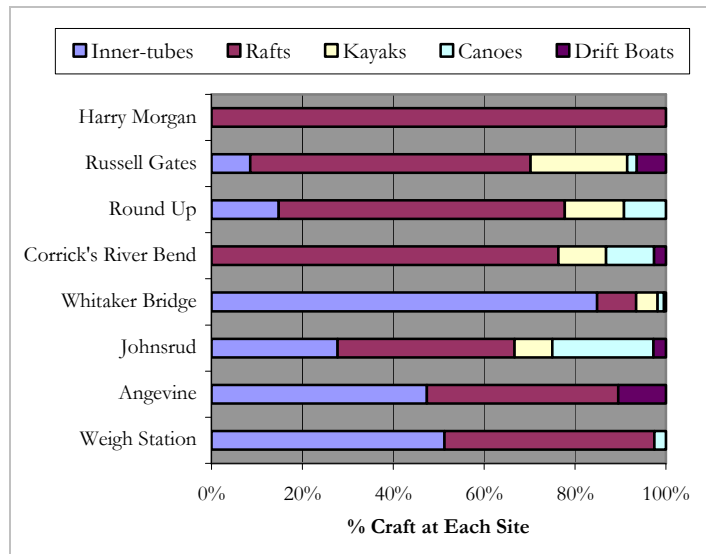
Figure 6: 2008 Percentage of People per Activity per Site.



Floating is popular throughout the Blackfoot with float angling use being more popular in the upper reaches of the Blackfoot and non-float recreation being more popular in the lower reaches of the river.

Figure 7 shows the type of craft used and the percentage of each type of craft used at each access site. Rafts are one of the most popular types of craft used to float the Blackfoot River and are used in all reaches. Inner-tubes are also very popular during the summer months however most of this use occurs in the lower reaches.

Figure 7: 2008 Type and Percentage of Craft Use by Site.



Special Recreation Permit SRP Program

FWP and the BLM have a cooperative Special Recreation Permit (SRP) Program for managing commercial use, organized groups and competitive events on the Blackfoot River and adjacent agency owned or managed lands. Use reports are required for each authorized permittee and that data is compiled at the end of the year. In 2008 there were 70 active commercial permittees, 7 organized groups and 1 competitive event authorized under the Blackfoot SRP Program. A description of the use authorized by the SRP program are described under the following three categories: (1) commercial use, (2) organized groups and (3) competitive events.

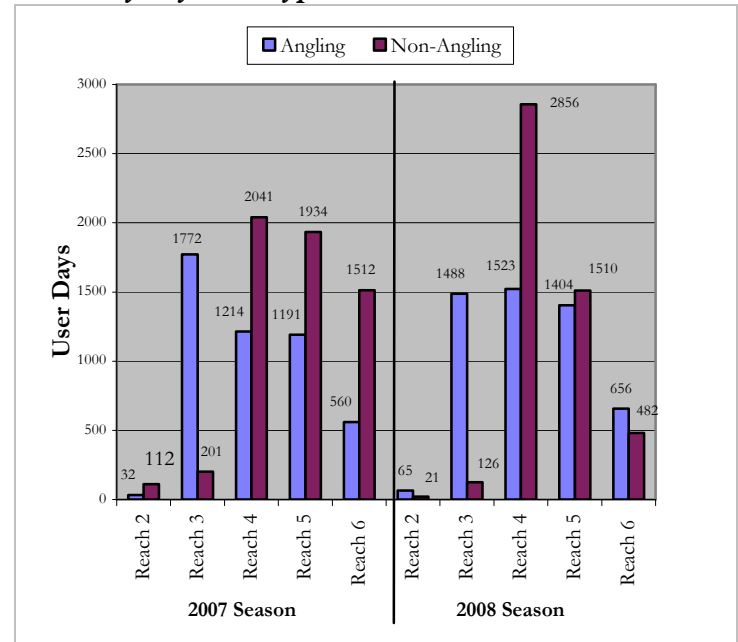


Recreationists on the lower Blackfoot River

Commercial Use

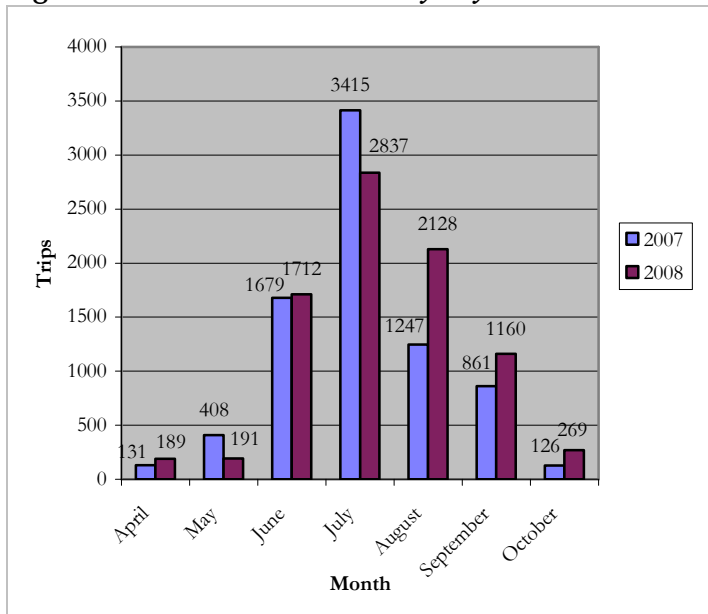
The primary types of commercial use occurring on the Blackfoot River are guided float fishing and whitewater trips. Figure 8 illustrates the number of angling and non-angling user days conducted on the Blackfoot River for each reach during 2007 and 2008. Commercial float opportunities are not permitted in reach one and no commercial wade angling was reported. No commercial use was reported for reach seven.

Figure 8: 2007 and 2008 Blackfoot Commercial User Days by Use Type and Reach



The majority of commercial angling use occurs in reaches three, four, and five. The angling use in 2007 is lower than in 2008 due to fishing restrictions that were in place during the end of the 2007 season. Non-angling commercial use such as whitewater trips, scenic floats, and whitewater rescue training primarily takes place from reach four down river. In 2008 high spring runoff made it difficult to float other rivers in the area, such as the Alberton Gorge, which led to an increase in non-angling use on the Blackfoot. Figure 9 shows the number of commercial trips taken during each month of the 2008 commercial season.

Figure 9: Commercial User Days by Month



The primary season of commercial use is Memorial Day through Labor Day. In 2008 72% of the total user days occurred in that time period. Compared to 2007, the 2008 commercial use levels were lower in July but increased in August and September. This could be due, in part, to the lack of fishing restrictions during the 2008 season. There was one trip in March (not shown on graph) consisting of three user days. Figure 9 shows the number of user days for each month in 2007 and 2008.

Organized Groups

Organized group activities consisted of 6 groups with 305 participants. The groups included a family reunion, youth camp, University of Montana (UM) Alumni float, UM marching band picnic, potluck at Corrick's River Bend FAS and a church group float race.

Competitive Events

One competitive event took place on the Blackfoot River and consisted of a kayak slalom competition and downriver canoe race. The slalom course was set up at the Sheep Flats access site and the downriver race began at Johnsrud and ended at Weigh Station. 59 participants attended the event.

Table 4: Blackfoot River Clean-up Statistics

Year	Trash Collected						Participants
	Aluminum Cans	Glass Bottles	Plastic Bottles	Shoes	Hats	Inner-Tubes	
2004	1951	300	N/A	36	N/A	N/A	74
2005	2741	173	185	63	19	12	101
2006	3994	250	297	84	N/A	16	118
2007	3365	194	459	88	8	18	257
2008	1131	54	171	58	8	0	173

Fee Revenue

Table 5 shows the breakdown of fees collected for certain types of recreational activities on the Blackfoot River and at access sites. Fees are collected at campgrounds, for picnic shelter reservation and for commercial users, competitive events and organized groups permitted under the Blackfoot River SRP program. The total amount of fee revenue generated for 2008 was \$46,761.58.

Table 5: Fee Revenue Summary

Source	Fee Revenue Generated
Harry Morgan Campground	\$865.00
River Junction Campground	\$2,156.75
Russell Gates Campground	\$4,819.84
Ninemile Prairie Campground	\$819.00
Corrick's River Bend Campground	\$6,042.83
Thibodeau Campground	\$4,769.60
Johnsrud Shelter Rental	\$250
Commercial SRP	\$26,248.56
Organized Group SRP	\$672.00
Competitive Event SRP	\$118.00
Total	\$46,761.58

Blackfoot River Clean-up

The fifth annual Blackfoot River Clean-up took place on July 26th. The event is held on the fourth Saturday in July and is sponsored by the Blackfoot Home and Community Club, FWP and the BLM. The amount of trash collected and number of participants was down from previous years. This could be due to the success of previous clean-ups and the distribution of free mesh trash bags for river users. The number of cans collected was over half of last year's amount and the number of glass bottles collected was down substantially from 194 in 2007 to 54 in 2008. This is likely due to the prohibition and enforcement of the use of glass containers. The cleanup also saw a decrease in the number of scuba divers who participated, limiting the ability of some groups to collect trash from deep holes in the river. Overall, the clean-up was very successful.

Table 4 compares the amount of litter collected for each clean-up year and the number of participants involved.



Volunteers at the Blackfoot Clean-up.

Enforcement

Coordinated law enforcement is an important tool in managing recreation on the Blackfoot River. In 2004, a Blackfoot Corridor enforcement operational guideline was established to coordinate the efforts of FWP, the BLM, Missoula County Sheriff's Office, the Montana Highway Patrol, Potomac-Greenough Fire and Quick Response Unit (QRU) and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The main focus of this coordination is to provide a safe environment for Blackfoot recreationists. Pre-season and end-of-season meetings have led to productive efforts to reduce public safety concerns and increase the quality of recreational opportunities in the lower reaches of the Blackfoot River, particularly in the area between Whitaker Bridge and Johnsrud FAS. Enforcement efforts have taken a no-tolerance approach to violations such as disorderly behavior, public urination, nudity, underage possession of alcohol, illegal drug use, and glass containers. The coordinated efforts continue to be effective. In 2008, combined enforcement efforts in the Blackfoot totaled 143 warnings, 59 citations, and 13 arrests. There was one drowning and several reports of near drownings that were associated with the high and cold water conditions. In comparison to previous years, the number of overall violations was down in 2008 including a drop in glass container violations. This achievement has helped promote a more family friendly atmosphere.

Accomplishments

- Great progress has been made with the RRAFT planning committee. The committee is nearing the final phases of a draft recreation management plan for the Blackfoot River which will be available for public review soon. More information about the planning process can be found online at:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/recreation/management/river/blackfootPlan.html>

- The Milltown Dam removal project has progressed with 2/3 of the sediment removed. Restoration of the natural river channel is scheduled to begin in 2009. The area continues to be closed to recreation while construction efforts are underway.
- A left hand turn lane was added at the turn-off from Highway 200 to Johnsrud Rd and to McNamara's Landing. The turning lanes were added by the Montana Department of Transportation to increase safety at the intersections.
- The redesign and construction of Scotty Brown Bridge FAS is complete. The new site accommodates 4 vehicles with trailers and has a staging area for easier river access. It is still a hand launch only area and parking restrictions on the road remain in place and will be enforced.



Scotty Brown Bridge FAS near end of construction.

References

The following references pertaining to river recreation management on the Blackfoot River are available at the Region 2 FWP Headquarters in Missoula, MT.

- Blackfoot River Recreation Corridor Landowner's Agreement
- Blackfoot River Recreation Management Direction
- Blackfoot River Special Recreation Permit Program (SRP) Program Administrative Rule

Contact Information

For further information about the content of this annual report or for questions/comments regarding recreation or recreation management, please contact the FWP Blackfoot River Recreation Manager.

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